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May 4 2007, 16:44  
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# DEW TRANSMITTER I – RUMINATING ON MUTUS LIBER & DEE'S MONAD



Various versions of this famous alchemical illustration have been used in the artwork accompanying my music. First on the back of the *Toadsman's Bell*, then printed on the CD of *Heard Gripe Hrusan*, and most recently on the Pneumatic Consort cover. I thought it might be a good time to post my interpretation of this image in order to start a few posts on my pet subject: dew.

The above illustration is the fourth plate of the [Mutus Liber](#), or 'Silent Book', a short alchemical document consisting of 15 plates with text on only four of the plates (the first and the last three). The book was first published in 1677, attributed to 'Altus'. I've not had

time to look as closely at the *Mutus Liber* as I would like – I’ve not read [Adam McLean](#)’s publication of it, nor have I yet read a full translation of Eugene Canseliet’s commentary (outside of the excerpt in Jacques Sadoul’s [Alchemists and Gold](#)). What follows is my personal interpretation of the symbolism in the image.

The picture is one of three in the series that depict a field with a ram and bull. Five canvasses are pegged out in the field and a man and woman are straining a sixth into a container. A ram and the sun dominate the left of the picture, a bull and the moon the right. There is a town in the background with at least one church-like building topped with a cross. Rays appear too be falling from the heavens onto the field. All of these elements are consistent in the four sources of the work that I am familiar with and I regard them as being the fundamental elements of the symbolism. Between the various sources the number of rays and crosses vary, so I’m discounting any numerological significance that these may have.

So, why is this couple outside, wringing canvasses? It appears that they are collecting dew from the fields, an element of what Jacques Sadoul called “the raw material of the (Philosopher’s) Stone, the secret fire, a certain quantity of dew, and a furnace.” (p.239). The [first plate](#) of *Mutus Liber* contains some Biblical citations, amongst them being an indication to read Genesis 27:28 – “So God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fat places of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.” This same Biblical quotation appears on the title page of John Dee’s [Hieroglyphic Monad](#) (1564), a work very influential on the alchemists and on the Rosicrucian movement that would follow. For some examples of Dee’s influence, take a look at this [pdf](#) by Peter J. Forshaw.

I think that the influence of Dee’s work is marked on the *Mutus Liber*. As has just been mentioned, the title pages both share the same Biblical text. Furthermore, the 13th plate of *Mutus Liber* has a list of numbers – 100, 1000, 10,000 &c. These multiples of ten occur numerous times in Dee’s *Monas*. In his prefatory letter to King Maximilian, multiples between 1 and 1,000,000,000 are used in an illustration entitled *Arbor Raritatis* that illustrates the two paths a man’s life may take and that only one man in a billion may attain spiritual adeptness. It seems that this ‘mathematical progression, from one to one-

thousand' dominated Dee's thought – it occurs in two of the charts of numbers relating the 'Nature's Mysteries' at the end of Theorem XXII (omitted in the online version linked above). These may relate to Dee's assertion that "the Sun and Moon of this Monad desire their elements, in which the denarian (tenth) proportion will be strong, to be separated, and that this be done with the aid of fire." (Theorem X, Josten's translation). In alchemical practice the numbers refer to the process of multiplication, for example see the 30th aphorism of [Bacstrom](#).

The influence of the Monad is also, I believe, apparent in the illustration being discussed. While Canseliet claims the picture is an indication that the dew should be gathered "between the months of Aries and Taurus", I think that there is something even more specific being hinted at. Dee's theorems XIV and XV allude to the alchemical *prima materia* and the conditions for gathering it. Firstly:

”

#### Theorem XIV

It has clearly been proved that this whole magisterial work depends upon the Sun and the Moon, [a fact] of which a long time ago that thrice-great Hermes admonished us, when he asserted that the Sun is its father and the Moon its mother; and we know that it is nourished in Lemnian earth by lunar and solar rays which exert a singular influence around it. (Josten)

As can be seen in the *Mutus Liber* image, all the elements of Dee's above theorem are present - the Sun and Moon and a combination of two-types of ray (Lunar and Solar) descending upon the earth, which is incidentally coloured red (terra lemnia). The next theorem appears to obliquely hint at astrological timings for the Great Work:

”

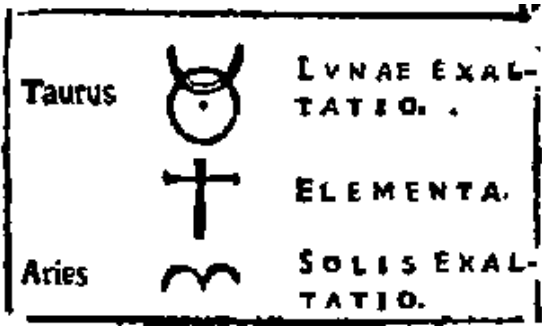
#### Theorem XV

Accordingly we propose for the consideration of philosophers the labour of Sun and Moon around the earth; in particular, how the Moon, while the Sun's splendour is in Aries, receives a new dignity of light in the next adjoining sign (namely Taurus) and is exalted above her innate powers. The ancients explained

this vicinity of the luminaries (most remarkable of all) by a certain mystical symbol called Taurus. As this is known, it has been handed down from the first age of Man (among the opinions of the astronomers) that Taurus is the exaltation of the Moon. [...] We also propose for the consideration of philosophers how the Sun, having suffered some eclipses of its light, receives Martian strength, and why in the very house of Mars (namely in our Aries) it is said to be triumphant in its exaltation. (Josten)

It is my opinion that the presence of the ram and bull in the picture refer not just to the 'months of Aries and Taurus', but to a specific time that is most favourable for the collection of dew – e.g. when the Sun is in Aries and the Moon in Taurus. The most optimal time, according to the rules of astrology would be with the Sun in the 19th degree of Aries and the Moon in the third of Taurus. Since dew only appears in the correct atmospheric conditions around sunset and sunrise, it would seem that the chance of finding these conditions at this precise time is something like Dee's one-in-a-billion! Perhaps Canseliet was just being practical with his "months of Aries and Taurus" and perhaps it would be most sensible to collect the dew when either the Sun is (exalted) in Aries, or the Moon is (exalted) in Taurus... Either that or I'll see you in the fields on the morning of April 8th, 2016...

There's one other piece of possible Monadic symbolism in the picture that occurred to me. The *Hieroglyphic Monad* consists of the symbols of Taurus and Aries joined by a cross – as Dee writes: 'the following is a true and apt description: the exaltations of the Moon and Sun interpreted by the science of the elements.' (Theorem XV) The illustration shows the zoomorphic images of Aries and Taurus on each side of the image – could the cross on the steeple symbolise the elements? I note that one of the sources has four buildings with crosses, so perhaps the elemental connection was made by at least one copyist.



The rural landscape and distant town bathed in the ethereal light of sunrise or sunset along the strange rites of this mystic brother and sister are images with an archetypal quality. Regardless of any perceived symbolism, when I look at this picture with abstracted gaze it has a profound emotional impact, I would count this image as one of my favourite ‘works or art’.

alchemy

astrology

dee

dew

hieroglyphic monad

moon

mutus liber

sun

In a future post I'll discuss some dew collectors antique and contemporary and what they've done with their samples of *flos coeli*.

Posts with tag

Dark Swan, Green Lion

Golden Interlude

Rosicrucian Redux

1 comment

POST A NEW COMMENT

Anonymous · May 9 2007, 17:46:13 UTC

hi phil



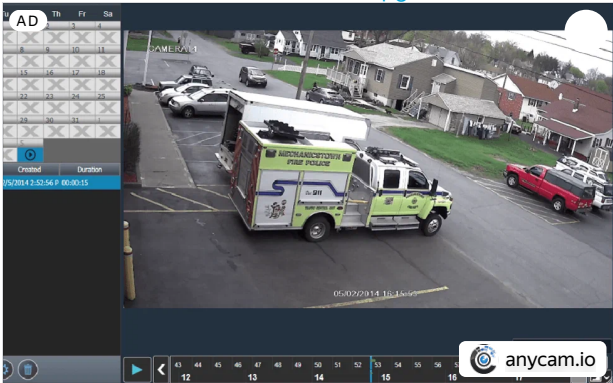
Thanks for sending the journal link. I have been reading it last couple of days - excellent thought provoking entries all of them. I'll try and make a habit of reading these... it's a nice way of me keeping informed of your activities across the board. indeed I've been using Google maps recently to help with some English Heretic stories I am working on. For example, it's useful to get an aerial view of Medmenham Abbey, which wasn't accessible when i tried to visit it a while back... handy tool indeed for meta-fiction!

all the best  
Andy Sharp

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January 1 2011, 22:59

# Dark Swan, Green Lion

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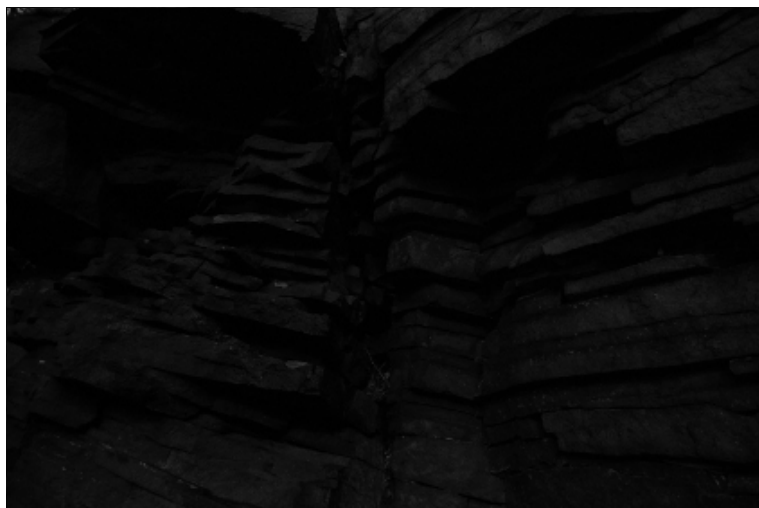
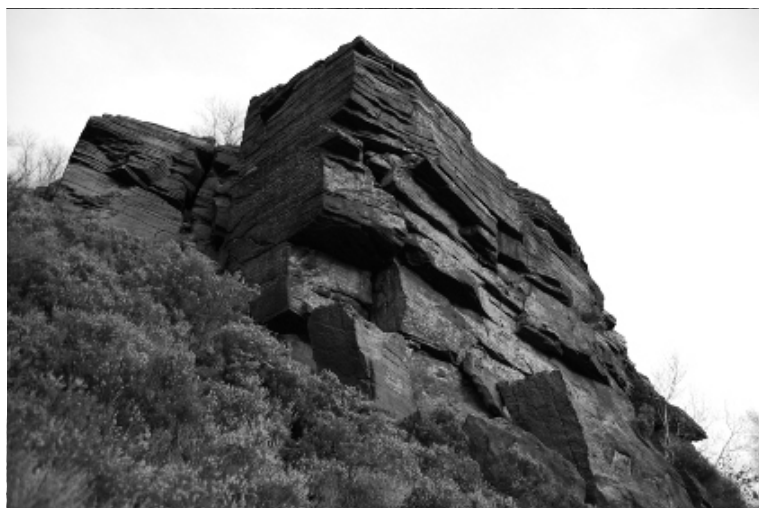
Some random ravings about Heptonstall, with photos by [Layla Bert Smith](#).

After reading Ted Hughes' [Remains of Elmet](#) and being inspired by Fay Godwin's beautiful [photograph](#) of the church, radiant amidst sun and mist, it was decided that we had to take a trip to Heptonstall. Walking up through Hebden Bridge, past the Hell Hole, ruddy crags and

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3/19/23, 10:40 PM

a towering wall of gritstone forced from the bowels of the earth, we found it, just beyond an estate of new housing on top of the ridge.



Prior to entering the church grounds curiosity took us to Sylvia Plath's grave in the adjoining churchyard. Biro's and pencils are to be found in prodigious quantities. Ritual offerings to a chthonic muse, perhaps?





Walking round the perimeter of the new church I remarked how some of the carved figures looked as though they were dragging themselves out from the fabric of the building. It was later, having returned home, that I noted a similar image in Ted Hughes' poem *Heptonstall*

*Old Church:*

*A great bird landed here.*

*Its song drew men out of rock,  
Living men out of bog and heather.*



Recently in [Northern Earth](#) (Issue 123), Brian Taylor wrote a piece about Ted Hughes' poetry and the relation between poetic imagination and shamanism, and while writing this I have just discovered [Ann Skea](#)'s amazing resource on Ted Hughes, magic, cabala, tarot and the bardic tradition. I know next to nothing about Hughes, although I appreciate the bleakness of his vision of the fall of the ancient kingdom of Elmet, Calder industry and its ultimate, apocalyptic redemption. However, the image is of the great bird is striking. Skea associates the bird with the illuminating spiritual song of the earth. That which once “put a light in the valley” is now forgotten:

*The valleys went out.*

*The moorland broke loose.*



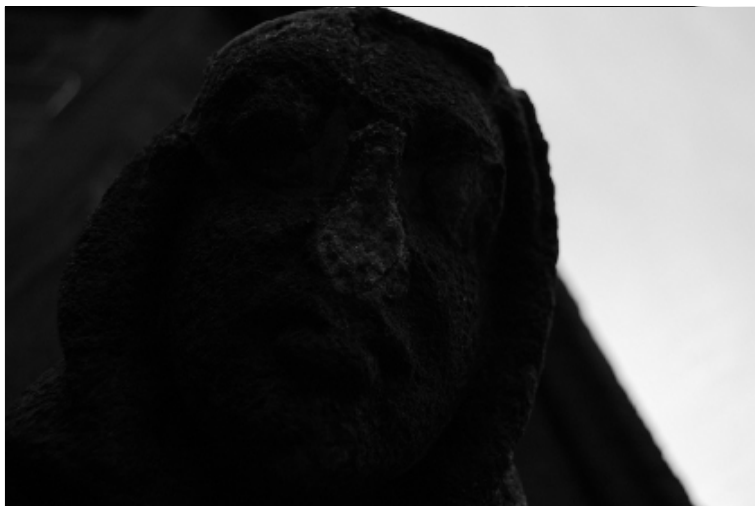
In *Heptonstall Churchyard* Hughes connects his own lineage with feathers upon the “giant beating wing” of the moors - “a family of dark swans.” Perhaps the great bird in question is an expression of the genius of the landscape, forgotten as a consequence of mankind's relationship with the land:

*Its giant bones*

*Blackened and became a mystery.*

*The crystal in men's heads*

*Blackened and fell to pieces.*



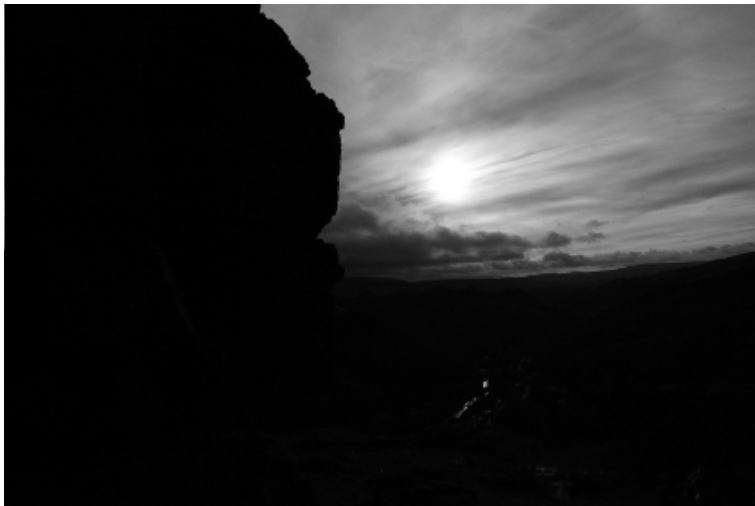
Later to be transformed into an angel:

*[...]And it was a swan the size of a city!*

*Far too heavy for the air, it pounded towards me,  
Low over Hathershelf.*

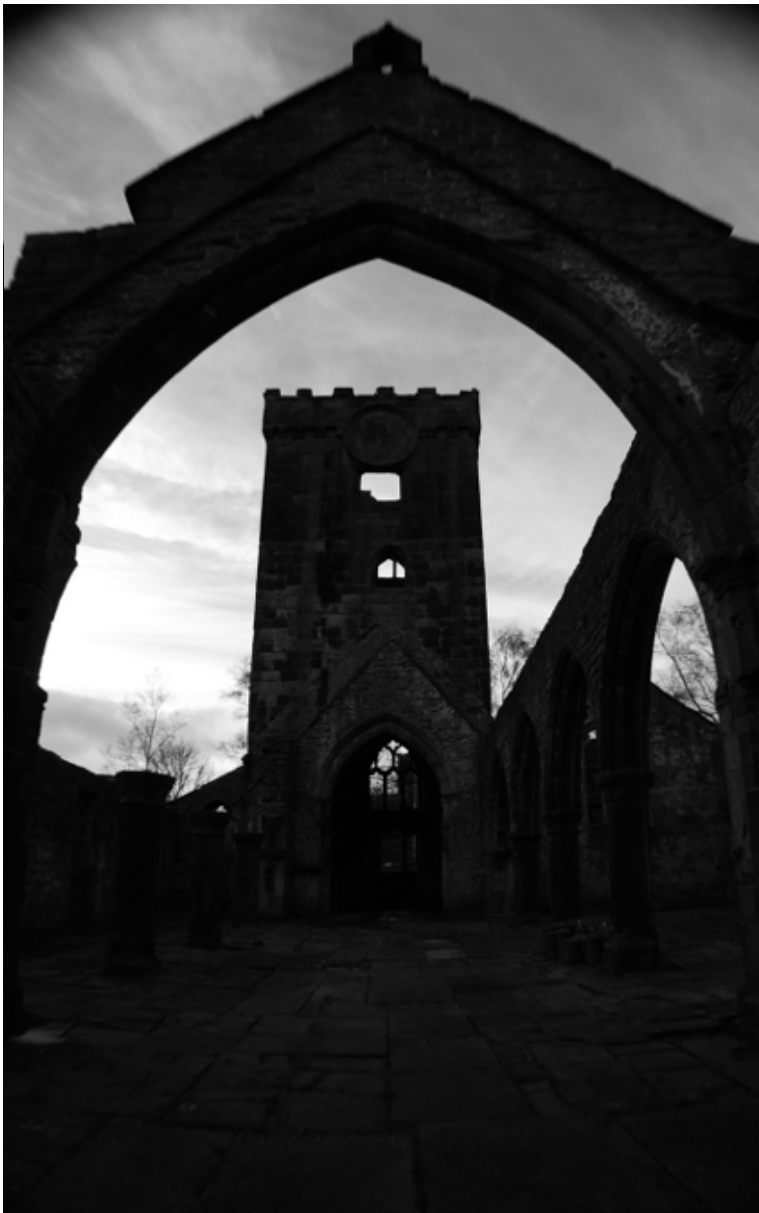
*And it was no swan.*

*It was an angel made of smoking snow.*



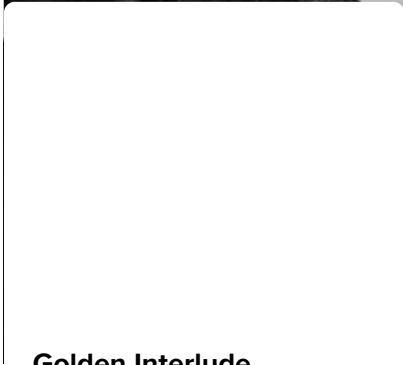
Within the Old Church itself the seat of the genius loci would have to be found not at the altar (still consecrated and used on occasion), but within the peculiar medieval sculpture of a lion's head to its immediate left. Not blackened, but green from the tincture of time, the beast gazes across nave and transept, a silent guardian. Here is a place of green lions, dark swans, smoking angels: players in a shamanic, alchemical and imaginative drama...

*Any audience is incidental.*





manism alchemy ted hughes



Golden Interlude



Rosicrucian Redux

Fine Horseman: The  
Secret Science of  
Horsemanship

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